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LETTER DATED 1 MARCH 1999 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith an address to the nation delivered by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in Freetown on 28 February 1999.

I should be grateful if the said address could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

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Annex

Address delivered by the President of Sierra Leone to the nation on 28 February 1999

Fellow citizens, first of all, let me say that I am encouraged by your positive reaction to my initiative to talk to you regularly on radio and television. This is of course the best means of reaching the great majority of our people at the same time. I thank you for listening to these broadcasts in which I try, as part of my duty, to bring you up to date, not just with the progress we continue to make in containing the series of rebel armed attacks, but more importantly with our effort to bring about lasting peace to our beloved country.

I know that there are many pressing problems and concerns you would like me to talk about today. However, please allow me to address two very important issues in the context of our search for peace - genuine and lasting peace.

You remember that last week I asked how long we had to go on making concessions for peace when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and their allies continue to attack, kill, maim and terrorize our people. I then declared, on your behalf, that all further calls for dialogue and political settlement should be directed at the RUF, their allies and supporters. Again, this was why I appealed to them to try, for a change, to make concessions for peace if they really want peace.

Well, today, fellow citizens, I am pleased to tell you that the RUF rebels and their allies have apparently responded to our appeal, albeit partially, by making one small incremental step towards peace. I understand that they have now decided to accept the offer I had made three weeks ago to allow the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, to meet face-to-face with other members of the RUF leadership so that they could have their own dialogue and consultations on how they intend to pursue the peace process.

You would be interested to know that soon after we made that offer we suggested that he could meet them at a neutral and safe venue, for instance on a frigate inside Sierra Leone's territorial waters. We had to take into account the fact that Foday Sankoh's appeal against his conviction for treason is still pending before the Sierra Leone court of appeal.

I wish to emphasize here that this is not the first time I am allowing Foday Sankoh to consult with his comrades-in-arms, even though he is under conviction. You remember very well that because I have always been prepared to demonstrate my commitment to peace, because we have already made enough sacrifices for peace and because sustainable and lasting peace are vital for the very survival of this nation, I had even allowed Foday Sankoh to travel to Conakry, in January this year, to talk to one of his commanders, by satellite telephone, and to confirm the agreement he and I had reached earlier in the month for a ceasefire. He later refused to confirm that we had reached such an agreement. Meanwhile, his RUF rebels and their allies have continued their brutal war against the people of Sierra Leone.

Fellow citizens, now that they seem to be asking for another opportunity to get their act together, first through dialogue among themselves, now that they have apparently accepted my offer to give Foday Sankoh an opportunity and allow him, this time, to have a face-to-face dialogue with the RUF leadership, and now that they seem to have realized the necessity of giving peace a chance, I would like to inform them, on your behalf, that although we have not yet received any formal response to our offer to allow them to meet on board a foreign frigate in our territorial waters, we have no objection to allowing Foday Sankoh to meet with the RUF leadership for consultations and dialogue, in Lome (Togo) or Bamako (Mali).

This decision is being made bearing in mind the fact that Foday Sankoh's appeal against his conviction for treason is still pending before the Sierra Leone court of appeal. Indeed, we should remind the rest of the world that there are other Sierra Leoneans who have also been convicted of the same crime and whose appeals are also still pending in our independent judicial system.

Therefore, our decision that Foday Sankoh could meet his RUF leadership in Lome or Bamako is based on the clear and unequivocal understanding that after their internal dialogue and consultations, Foday Sankoh would be returned to Sierra Leone, without delay, to resume his defence against his conviction.

And this brings me to the second very important issue which I would like to address today. It comes in the form of an appeal.

Fellow citizens, on your behalf, I would like to make a solemn and urgent appeal to the RUF rebels, their allies and supporters to immediately release all our children - the thousands of children whom they have abducted, drugged, abused and used as weapons of destruction; innocent children whom they have armed and trained to murder and maim their own parents and other adults. We remember with sadness the public apology they, the RUF, made to us over the radio, on 18 June 1997, describing graphically how they had looked at our brothers and killed them in cold blood, how they had "removed our sisters from their hiding places to undo their femininity", how they had "slaughtered our mothers and butchered our fathers". They piously admitted that they had sinned and wronged the people by committing those atrocities. They apologized for their brutality and asked for our forgiveness. But we all know what they did after that public apology.

We care for our mothers and fathers, we care for our brothers and sisters, but we care more for our children and grandchildren. Although a large number of our children have been orphaned, and although the survivors of this brutal and unnecessary eight-year RUF rebellion are finding it very difficult to make ends meet, we still need our children; we can take care of them. They are the future of this nation. This is why we appeal to the RUF, their allies, arms suppliers and supporters to immediately release our children, including those whom they abducted during their invasion of our capital in January this year. We say to them: please, let our children go! Release them immediately!

I thank you all for your attention.